

Community Development Projects: The Impact it has on the Muncie Community

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Muncie, Indiana**

April 2018

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2018

SPC011
Undergrad
Thesis
LD
2489
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.035

Abstract

Freedom by Design is a program that not only helps better the community, but also gives the architecture students that are involved the chance to gain more experience outside of their college curriculum. The program is designed to challenge students in ways that they have not been challenged in the classroom, giving them opportunities to learn about different aspects of architecture and to gain hands-on experience while also serving their community.

Our design team has begun to discover what it takes to give back to the community and how rewarding it is to see the significant impacts that their community projects can have. With students participating in Freedom by Design throughout the nation, there has been an increase of community development projects on a larger scale that have an even greater impact on the connection between architects and their communities.

Our Freedom by Design project, based in a neighborhood that is suffering from the effects of underdevelopment, will give the community some encouragement to come together and strive to build a stronger, more engaged community. Though our project is small and may not have the immediate impact that we envision, we hope that, in the future, more projects will be carried out in addition to ours that will continue the community's movement in a positive, new direction.

We have designed and begun to construct a little free library that will be located in a pocket park in a Muncie neighborhood. With this addition to the park, we hope that both children and adults will be able to increase their reading levels as the result of access to a constant exchange of books located right next door to their homes. We hope to encourage the community to not only increase their reading, but also spend more of their time outdoors and in the company of family, neighbors, and friends. The team hopes that the little free library will bring the neighborhood together to create a stronger community that will work together to create a better environment for everyone.

The Ball State University chapter of Freedom by Design will continue its work in future years and will strive to build a stronger connection with the Muncie community, in hopes of creating a stronger relationship between the Muncie local residents and the students of Ball State University. I hope that this relationship will help bring Muncie residents together and begin to break down any perceived barriers between Ball State University and the Muncie community.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jonathan Spodek, my thesis advisor and Freedom by Design advisor, for everything he has done to help me find my place in this community and successfully carry out this community development project.

I would also like to thank Lindsey Arthur for all of her help with this project and introducing me to the Muncie community. You have helped me find my passion in life and have shown me what I am capable of.

Thank you to the entire Muncie community for allowing us to carry out this project and for all of your support.

Finally, I would like to thank my entire Freedom by Design team and everything they have done to complete this project and to support me. You have given so much to this community and deserve to be recognized for it.

Jacob Burris (Project Manager 2017-18)
Lisa Knust (Fundraising Chair 2017-18)
Michaela Greene (Media Chair 2017-18)
Alli Gerardot (Co-Director 2018-19)
Jessica Franke (Project Manager 2018-19)
Roberto Medina (Fundraising Chair 2018-19)
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Process Analysis

My Freedom by Design team and I completed this little free library project over the course of one semester. In addition to providing the little free library to the community, part of the project goal was to create a stronger relationship between Ball State University and the Muncie community. This part of the project presented more of a challenge than I had at first anticipated. When it comes to the current relationship between Ball State University and parts of the local Muncie community, we found that some unfortunate social barriers exist between the two. My team and I were challenged to address and overcome perceived barriers between the university and the local community residents.

As the director of the Ball State Chapter of Freedom by Design, I worked diligently to present my team's goals and to be accepted into the Muncie community. Before my team and I started the design work on the Little Free Library Project, I spent a lot of my time working directly with Lindsey Arthur, the

Chief Executive Officer from Habitat for Humanity, and building a relationship with her. I met with her personally almost every week to emphasize my team's drive to help a Muncie community and to discuss possible projects and what the best way was to get the community to back the project. The last thing I wanted to do was design and build a project that was of no use to the community.

When we first started discussing projects, we considered the idea of designing and building a bus stop shelter. The bus stop that we considered for the shelter is regularly used by both local residents and students, but it did not have any shelter to protect bus riders from harsh weather. Though this project has been put on hold for now due to reasons outside of our control, we are still trying to push it forward and hope that it will be a project for Freedom by Design in future years.

In addition to working with Habitat for Humanity, I began attending neighborhood association meetings in hopes of finding a new project that would

be of use to the community. I found that I loved working with people in the community. We discovered that we had the common goals of determining a need of the community that could reasonably be addressed within the time constraints and creating a feasible plan to design and implement the project. This spirit of cooperation towards a common goal helped me to determine that community development through architecture is one of the things I want to focus on in my career. I joined the Muncie Beautification Committee of my own accord and have gotten to know so many amazing individuals that give everything they can to their community.

There were so many different options that were brought up in the community that Freedom by Design could have helped with, but the final decision was made to design a little free library for the pocket park of Jefferson St. Everyone on the beautification committee decided that it was the best project for us to be able to complete within a semester. I brought all of this information back

to my design team and allowed them to brainstorm and present all of their thoughts and ideas. We discussed the best ways to move forward and attempted to take into consideration all of the issues that might arise when carrying out this project.

The Ball State University Freedom by Design team has made great strides this year with respect to increasing and promoting architecture students' participation in community involvement and development. The team members have given their time and effort to provide for the community, even though academic stress is high and projects are due. They have shown that even though they are only living in Muncie for a short time, they still care about the community and want to help increase others' standard of living. I believe that their work gives the world hope for a new generation and a brighter future for community development.

What is Freedom by Design?

As a sub-program under the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), a nationwide, independent, nonprofit and student-run organization, Freedom by Design is a community service program that utilizes the talents and design abilities of architecture students to impact the lives of the people in their surrounding communities. The students do this by going out into the community and looking for ways in which they can help and develop their community by conducting design build projects. These projects help further the students' architectural studies through experience as well as improving the community. There are five different barriers that are addressed when these projects are being carried out, namely physical, educational, environmental, socio-economic, and cultural. The Freedom by Design program encourages the students to serve their community with design solutions that will address the issues created by the noted barriers.

(Freedom by Design)



(Fig. 1) Freedom by Design Logo

The Freedom by Design program helps introduce the architecture students to the process of working with clients, licensed architects, and contractors, as well as understanding the impact that the projects have on the surrounding communities.

(Freedom by Design)

Projects that have been completed by Ball State Freedom by Design students in the past include designing and building ramps for local residents who cannot afford to install them, working with other programs and residents to design a community garden or community space, constructing a railing for someone in

need, and helping design and construct a learning center for children, in addition to many other important design projects. (Freedom by Design)

Our Freedom by Design board at Ball State University consists of me as the director; the construction manager, Jacob Burris; the fundraising chair, Lisa Knust; the media chair, Michaela Greene; and our faculty advisor, Jonathan Spodek. As a board, we not only address together the fundamental planning issues for the project, but also work collaboratively with the rest of the program's members as the designs are implemented. (Freedom by Design)

The Origin – Maring-Hunt Library

My fourth year architectural design studio was the trigger that began to focus my attention on studying and assisting the surrounding Muncie community. The point of that studio project was to get the students who were in their fourth year of study to go out into the community and both design and build a community garden pavilion for the Maring-Hunt

library. This pavilion project comprises a major piece of the master plan that was developed through a process of community planning done by the residents and the neighborhood association of the Thomas Park/Avondale Neighborhood.

The master plan consists of three separate pavilions that are developed around a large community garden that will be run by the library and the surrounding local residents. Each of the three pavilions has a different use; there is a gardeners' pavilion (already designed and constructed), a market pavilion (fully designed and currently being constructed), and an educational pavilion (not yet designed or constructed). The pavilion that my studio was working on was the market pavilion. The purpose of the market pavilion is to provide an area for the farmers' market to take place, while also providing the local residents with a space to sell the produce from the garden as well as homemade goods to the surrounding community. The pavilion would also have a community kitchen that could be rented to the local residents to

use for special occasions. Additionally, the pavilion has an educational purpose, as it would allow the children from the library and from the surrounding neighborhoods to come to learn about produce and healthy eating.

When beginning the design process, our studio split into three different groups to research and explore the different possibilities that would come with each aspect of the project. After researching, we came together and worked collaboratively to decide on a design that would best address each aspect. During the entire design process, we worked closely with the local community by having review meetings with the residents, addressing their concerns, and including their ideas in our final design.

This academic project opened my eyes to the effect that my fellow architecture students and I can have on the surrounding community. I recognized that in being the Freedom by Design director, I had the ability and the responsibility to work with other

architecture students to provide a service that would have an important impact on the surrounding community.

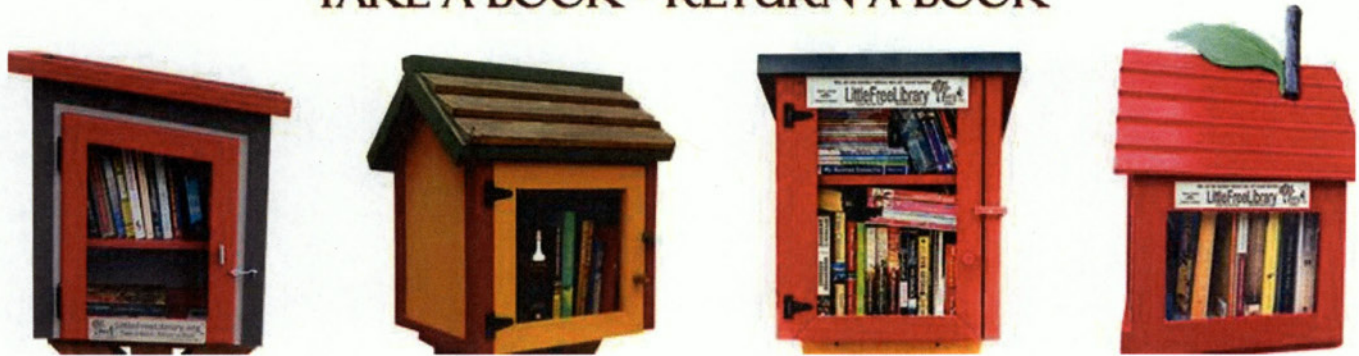
Collaborative Decision

When approached with the possibility of having an impact on the surrounding community, the Freedom by Design team began discussing what kind of projects would be plausible to carry out in the Muncie community. We discussed a variety of different options, but decided that a large issue that we could attempt to address is illiteracy in Muncie, and we could do this by designing and building little free libraries around the community. The team researched and found that little free libraries can be found all over the nation, and that they can have a significant impact on the surrounding community.

I brought our research to Habitat for Humanity, in hopes that they would have sites that would be supportive of stewarding a little free library if the Freedom by Design program did all the work designing, constructing, and

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(Fig. 2) Little Free Library Logo

installing the little free library. Habitat for Humanity provided us with multiple sites that might be interested in hosting a little free library and, ultimately, I chose a site that would allow the architecture students involved to utilize their talents and even come up with a more challenging design than the basic little free library design.

Little Free Library

Little Free Library is a non-profit organization that strives to inspire communities to read more and build stronger relationships with surrounding neighbors. The program is based out of Wisconsin, but has spread nationwide and into many other countries by creating a

network of little free libraries. The libraries can be premade and ordered, or designed and built by the community. When little free libraries are registered with the organization, the program documents the location of every little free library and helps to provide a constant selection of books for readers of all different ages. Studies show that 61% of low income families do not have any books for their children at home. Having 24/7 access to books and a constant exchange of books has helped improve the reading achievement of children who have access to the little free libraries. (Little Free Library)



(Fig. 3) Image of site produced by Ball State University Freedom by Design chapter

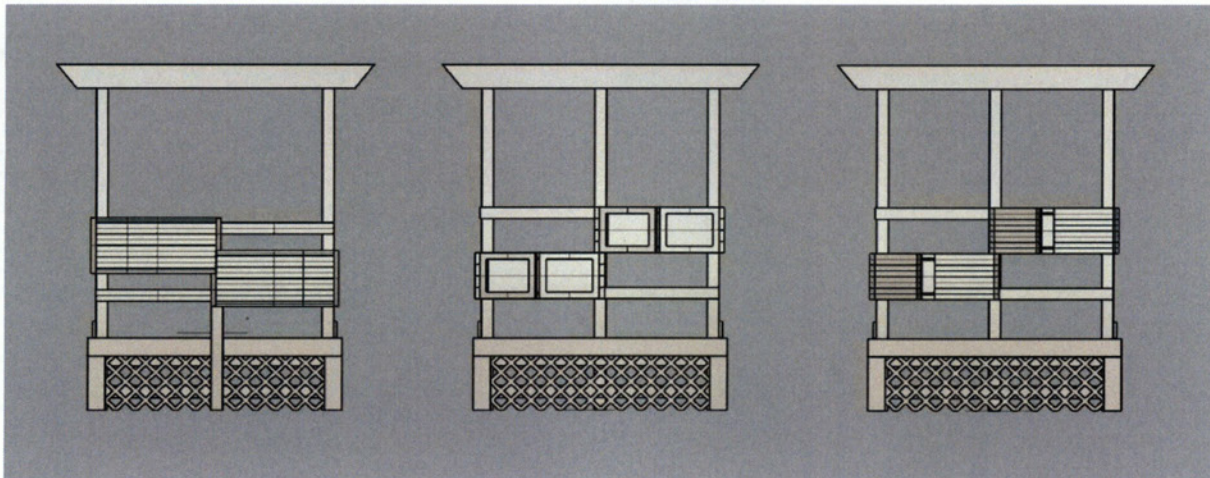
Site

The selected site is located in the Industry neighborhood on an abandoned lot off of Jefferson St. The site is owned by Habitat for Humanity. A few years ago, Habitat for Humanity did a project that involved designing the property into a pocket park for the surrounding neighborhood. The site includes a mulched area that contains a playground dome, four benches (two with tops and two without), a large tire swing, picnic tables, and a grill. The pocket park is utilized by the surrounding neighborhood

kids and adults, and, with the addition of the little free library, we hope to encourage more people to come outside to read, play, and socialize. We hope this addition to the park will also help build a stronger sense of community and pride in the neighborhood.

Design Exploration

Over the course of many weeks, the Freedom by Design team worked together to explore the site in order to design and appropriately place the little free library so that it would be prominent

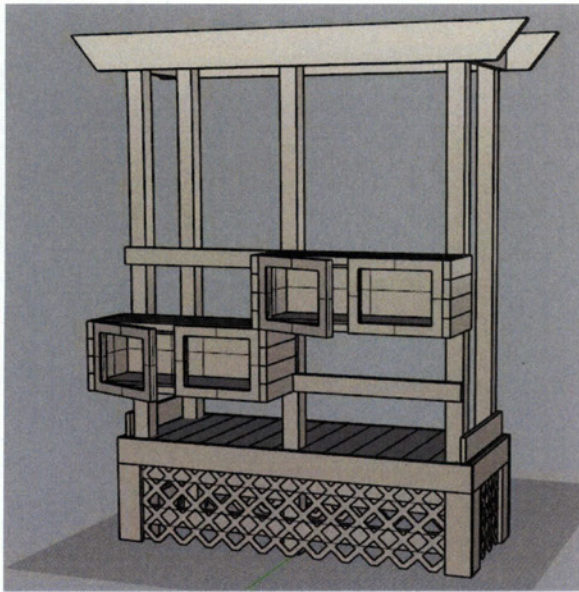


(Fig. 4) Graphics by Ball State University Freedom by Design chapter

as well as accessible. The team decided that to utilize the benches that are already on the site was the best means to integrate the little free library into the pocket park. We discussed a variety of different options and had multiple charrettes to further explore the way that the site could be used. After all of our meetings and design sessions, the team decided on a design that addresses all of the different issues that we encountered when researching and designing. Some of the issues that we needed to address were visibility, durability, vandalism, waterproofing, and overall structural design.

The team was able to utilize many of the skills that they have developed in

architecture school to design each aspect of this project as well as provide a design that will be useful and make an impact on the surrounding Muncie community. Many of our architectural design studios involve projects that will never make it to the real world. Therefore, many of our designs are never fully completed because it would be impractical in a studio setting. Working on a design build project provides the students with the ability to participate in all stages of the project as well as see the finished product, something that usually only happens when working in the field and not as often while in school.



(Fig. 5) Graphic produced by Ball State University Freedom by Design chapter

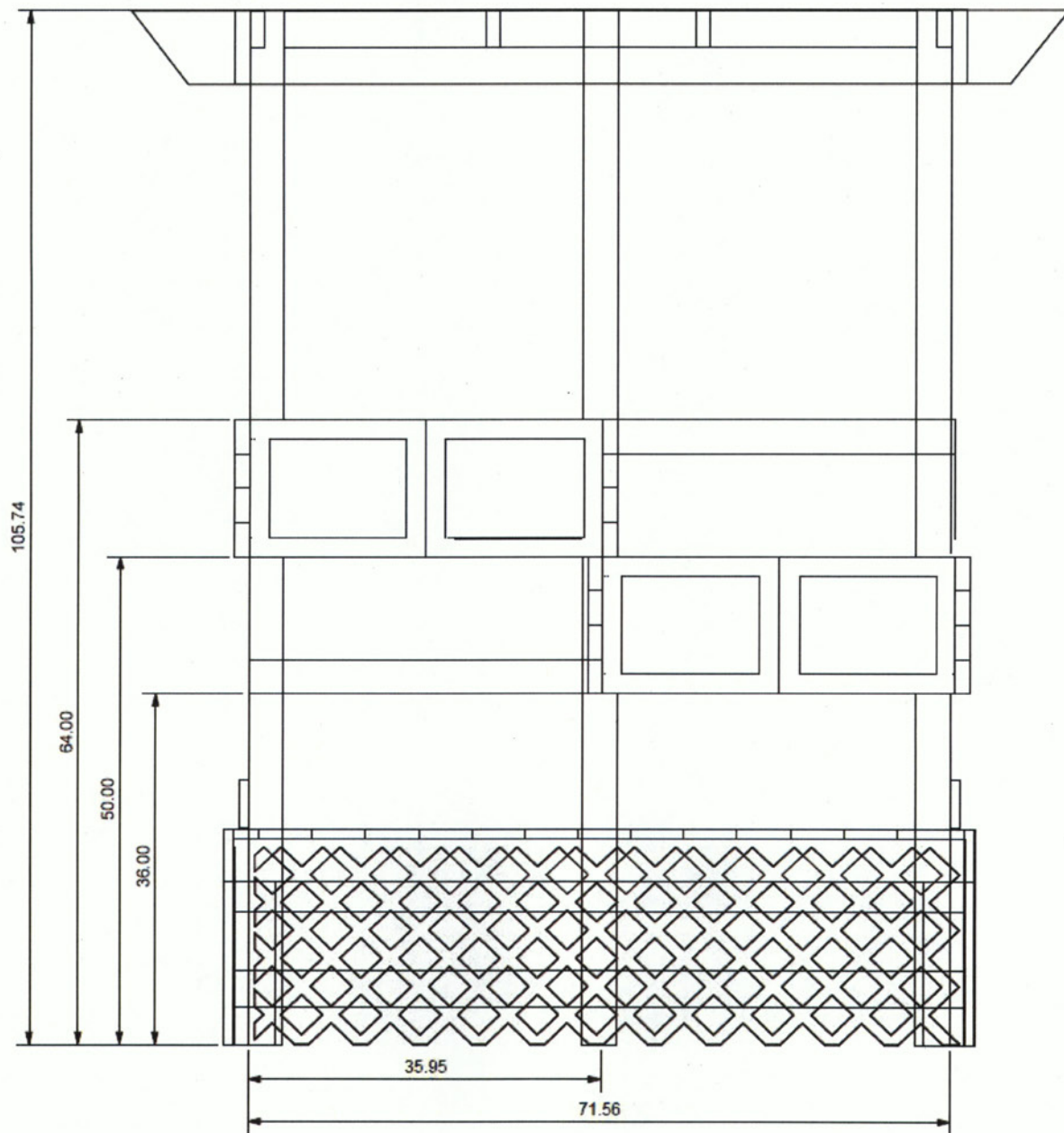
Final Design

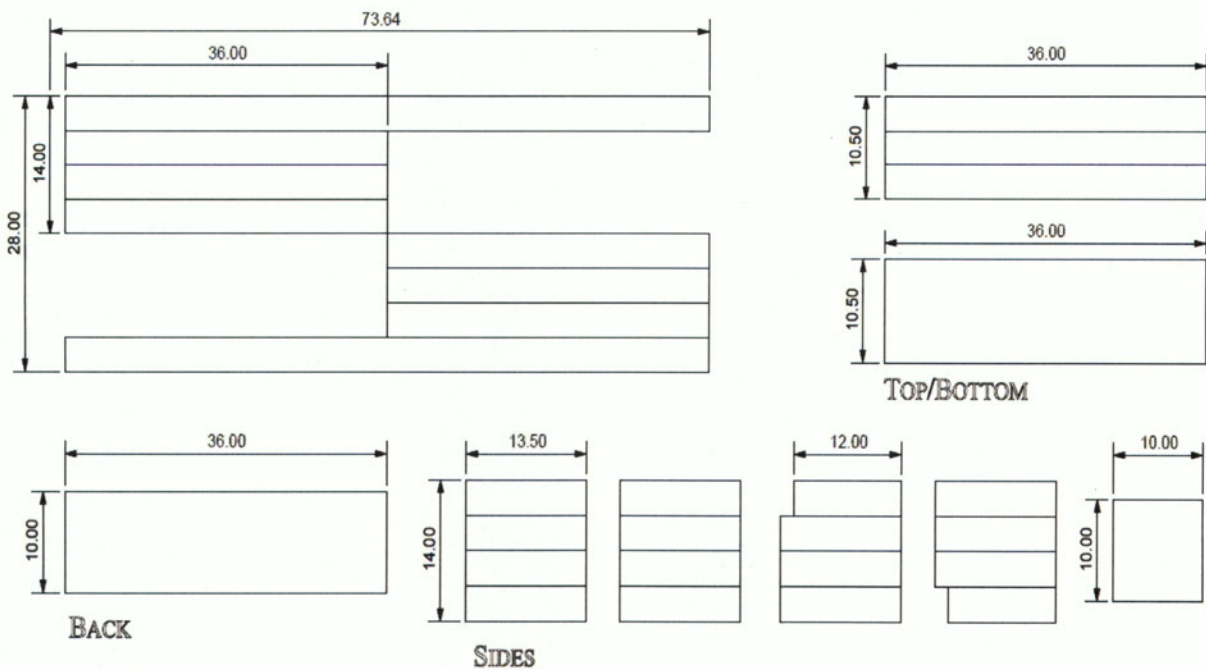
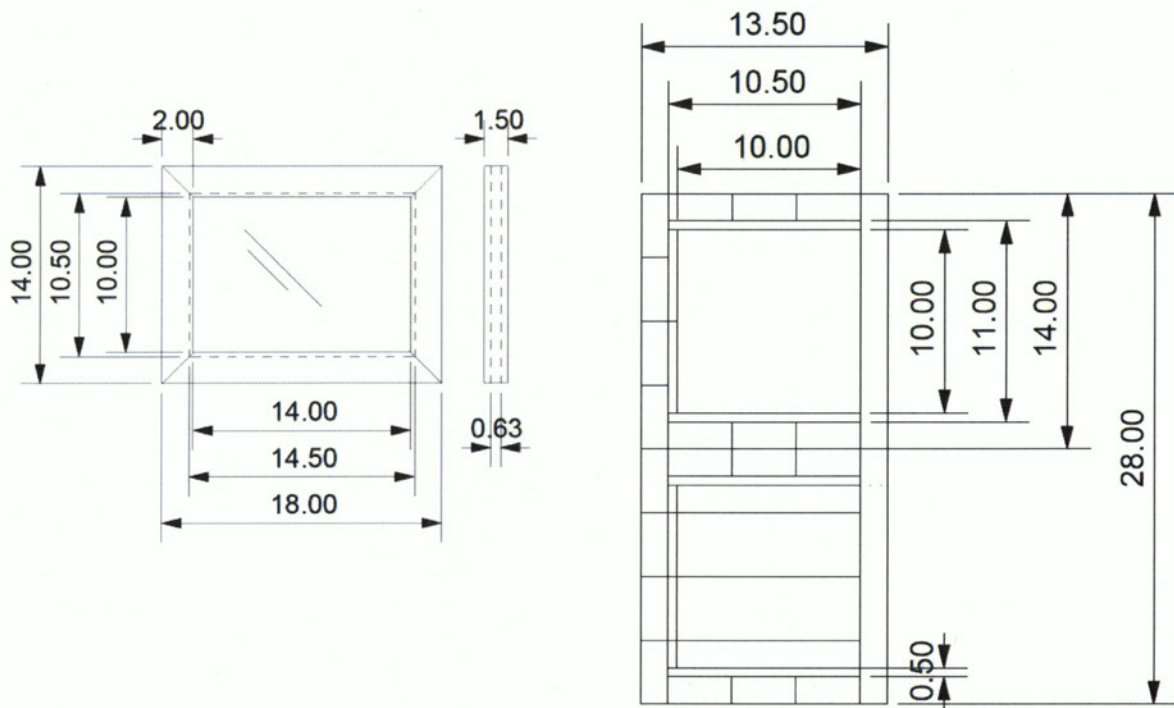
After discussing possible design ideas, we focused on one particular design and presented that to Habitat for Humanity for approval. The design team then split up into groups to start the documenting process. One group was responsible for the collection of information from the site, such as all of the dimensions of the existing benches as well as the directionality of the site. The second group was responsible for taking our design and making it structural and functional in a program and then creating the necessary documents needed to understand the construction

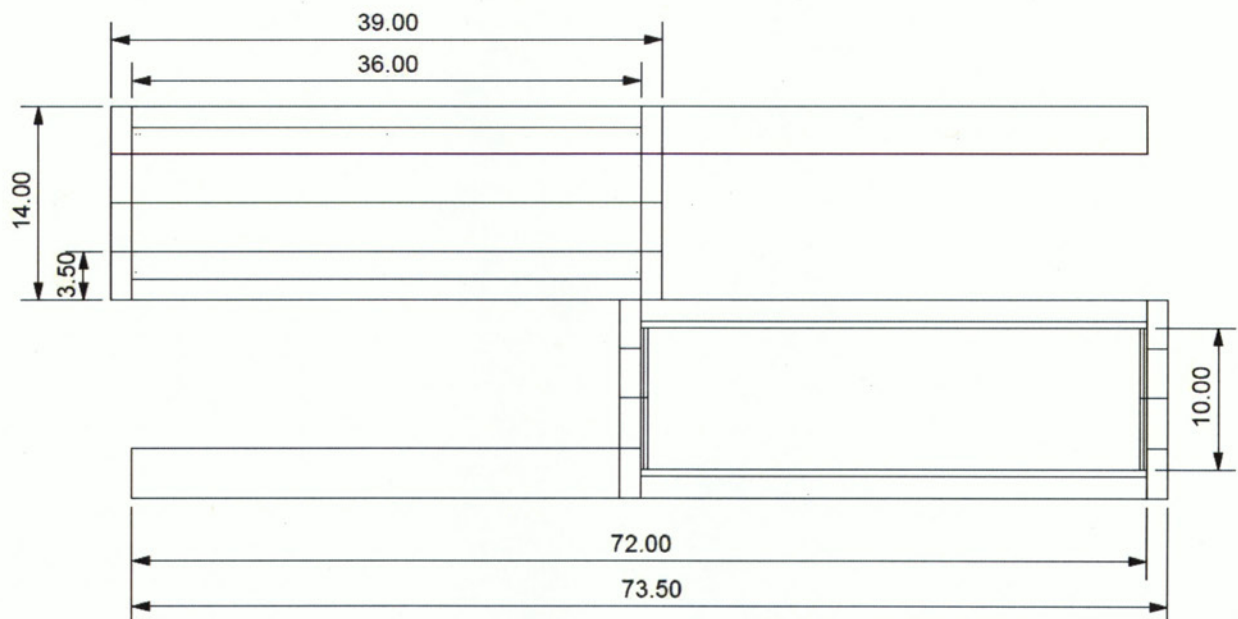
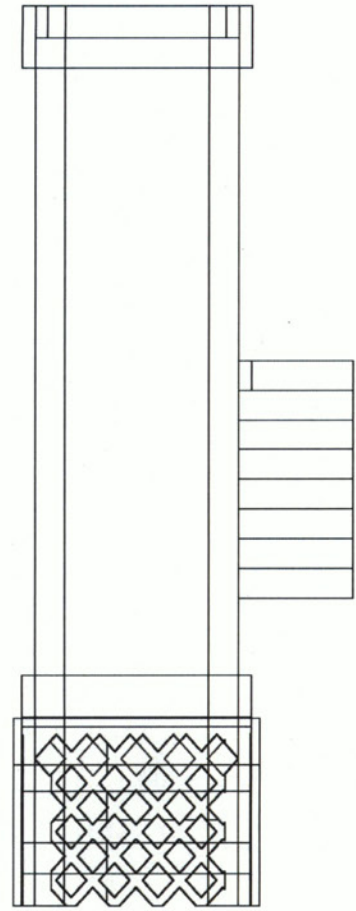
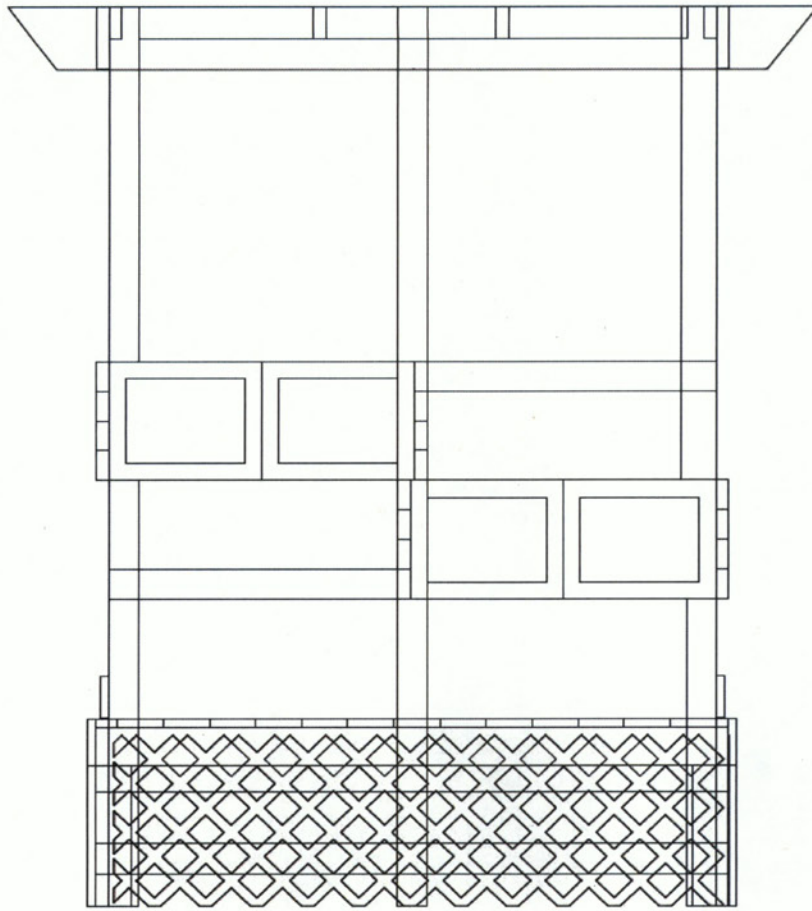
of the little free library. The third group was in charge of determining all of the materials needed to construct the design and then collecting all of the materials in time for our first build day. The final design consists of two boxes that are staggered diagonally from each other. The boxes are designed to create a back rest for one of the tall benches while still allowing for visibility throughout the site. The boxes are accessible from the back side of the bench and have doors that open like a cabinet. They provide more space for books than the pre-made little free libraries and also build onto an existing structure. Each box measures 36"x12.5"x13.5", providing substantial room for books and other possible supplies. The bench we have chosen to use for the little free library is at the front of the site, so that people are able to see it when they pass by. We hope that this placement will increase the number of people who will utilize the library.

Documentations

The following figures are the final drawings for the design of the little free library.









(Fig. 6) Image produced by Ball State University Freedom by Design chapter



(Fig. 7) Image produced by Ball State University Freedom by Design chapter



(Fig. 8) Image produced by Ball State University Freedom by Design chapter

Final Construction

While still in the process of building, the Freedom by Design team has conducted multiple build days to construct the little free library. The older students in the Freedom by Design program have taken this opportunity to teach the younger students about different construction methods and how to use various tools that they will likely need to use in the future. With all of our work in design and structure, architecture students are not provided as much knowledge on actual construction; therefore, in the Freedom by Design program, we try to use every step in the process to pass on practical knowledge and provide new experiences. The team members that will be graduating this year have used this project to show the younger members the way in which the program is run, so that the younger members will be able to continue the Freedom by Design work in future years.

Possible Effects on the Surrounding Community

According to studies of little free libraries based in other communities, there are many different benefits that result from installing a little free library in the midst of a community. One of the largest benefits is that it promotes literacy throughout the community. Research shows that approximately 14% of the US adult population is functionally illiterate. This is an alarming statistic that reveals a huge societal issue, especially because the ability to read is one of the bedrocks of being a successful adult and a responsible citizen. Literacy is fundamental to an engaged community. While these little free libraries cannot actually teach people how to read, they will encourage the idea of reading as well as provide a convenient and easy way to explore the possibility. (Kozak)

Another one of the largest benefits of the libraries is that they tend to promote general neighborliness. Our technology-engrossed society has become increasingly isolated, allowing us

to live next to people without much more than a single hello every so often. With the installation of little free libraries, there has been an increase of contact between neighbors. It has given people a common interest and a conversation piece. It has helped to build stronger communities and encourage people to communicate with each other and develop a greater amount of trust. (Mulligan)

Little Free Libraries can also help expand a person's literary horizons. With a constant exchange of books, it is likely that readers will come across books that they have never read before. People are introduced to new genres and series, all while gaining more knowledge through reading and communicating. (Mulligan)

There are so many positive aspects to having a little free library in a community. The number of little free libraries continues to grow throughout the nation and will hopefully continue to increase literacy rates as well as promote connections throughout communities. (Anderberg)

Intended Result

For many years, programs in Muncie have been striving to increase the literacy rate. Community leaders hope that, among other things, providing the community with little free libraries will encourage reading and community engagement. (Muncie-Delaware)

Our Freedom by Design team hopes that, with the addition of our little free library in this particular area in Muncie, both the children and the adults of Muncie will be able to increase their reading levels and, in turn, increase the literacy rate of the community. This neighborhood has had a difficult time due to abandonment of properties and other economic challenges. The residents need something to help pull the neighbors back together. It is the team's hope that this addition to the pocket park will encourage more people to get together, utilize the common space, and build better neighborhood connections.

Our team also hopes that this project will inspire a type of stewardship among the neighbors, whereby the

residents begin to understand that it is their responsibility to take care of this pocket park and continue to improve their community.

Critical Analysis

After working with and in the Freedom by Design program, I have found that it is not run as well as it could be. The program is student based, as is AIAS, but tends to be thrown to the side when it comes to the actual program. Since the program is smaller than AIAS, it is difficult to compete with it as well as get the students to commit their time. Though it offers service hours and AXP points, people tend to avoid committing to the program because they feel as though they will not have enough time to do an additional project on the side.

Another issue that I have found in this program is the interaction between the individual Freedom by Design chapters and national Freedom by Design board. The only time in which the individual chapters get information is at the Grassroots conference over

the summer or from the website. The Grassroots that I attended did not even provide us with the necessary information to feel comfortable leading this program. After speaking with many different chapter directors, I found that since I had a background in Freedom by Design, I was better off, but the chapters who had never before had a Freedom by Design program did not have any idea how to run the program. The national Freedom by Design board did not really have any answers for us, and sent us home more worried about this program than before.

The directors were left without guidance to run a program and find a project to get involved with the community. This is rather a daunting task for students who most likely do not live in the community that they are trying to help, and who are trying to carry out this program without anyone else to lean on. Though many different Freedom by Design chapters are successful in carrying out their projects, there are many chapters that are unable to gather enough people, or do not have the means to find a

project that will help their community.

The Freedom by Design program is an amazing idea and impactful when a project is finished, though it could be better thought out when it comes to support from the national board. There could be an increase of communication between nationals and the actual chapters, or there could be a type of mentorship program that helps and heads the programs from nationals. MUCH of the national program gives focus towards the AIAS side of the program, and if more focus was given to the Freedom by Design program, there would be a significant increase in the number of community service projects that are performed by architecture students throughout the nation.

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